

# Transnational Organization, Belonging, and Citizenship of Indigenous Mexican Migrants in the United States: The Case of Oaxaqueños in Los Angeles

Krannich, Sascha

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Sascha Krannich\*

Transnational Organization, Belonging,  
and Citizenship of Indigenous Mexican  
Migrants in the United States:  
The Case of Oaxaqueños in Los Angeles

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\* Ph.D. student at the Graduate School of Politics of the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität  
Münster and a scholarship holder of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation

Comments welcome to: [saschakrannich@uni-muenster.de](mailto:saschakrannich@uni-muenster.de)

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University of Bielefeld  
Center on Migration, Citizenship and Development (COMCAD)  
Postfach 100131  
D-33501 Bielefeld  
Homepage: [http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/tdrc/ag\\_comcad/](http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/tdrc/ag_comcad/)

## Abstract

Transnational migration challenges the congruency of citizenship and state territory, because migrants are able to create a sense of belonging to country of residence as well as origin simultaneously, and are capable to practice citizenship across national borders. The subject of transnational belonging and citizenship is all the more important when migration involves members of indigenous groups who are politically excluded, economically marginalized and socially discriminated in countries of origin as well as in their adopted countries. At the same time, participation in a transnational civil society through migrant organizations could offer them a serious opportunity to negotiate citizenship – that is primarily based on rights and duties, belonging, and political participation – by themselves in cooperation with partners below and above national levels. Thus, the central question of this paper is whether indigenous migrants actually organize to improve their social and political situation in country of destination as well as origin, and therefore, are able to negotiate and practice their self-determined citizenship in a transnational context. Based on the data collected from my ethnographic research in Los Angeles, I argue that indigenous migrants from Mexico's southern state of Oaxaca negotiate and practice citizenship through a well institutionalized community based on a diverse network of hometown associations and broad civic migrant organizations which open wide transnational sociocultural, political, and economic spaces to reconstruct the boundaries of local membership and belonging – a process that is quite different compared to other indigenous and mestizo migrant groups in the United States. The basic initiative to build transnational community citizenship comes from the indigenous diaspora in Los Angeles itself instead from political counterparts in Mexico. Here, they collaborate with various political institutions, businesses, churches, and other organizations on different levels (local, state, and national) in the United States and in Mexico. The main object of this paper is to unravel this multisided process of transnational indigenous citizenship building.

Keywords: transnationalism, transnational citizenship, indigenous migrants, Oaxaca, Mexico, United States

## **Transnational Organization, Belonging, and Citizenship of Indigenous Mexican Migrants in the United States: The Case of Oaxaqueños in Los Angeles**

### **1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

In a world of rising globalization and growing migration, questions about belonging and citizenship of people obtain a new connotation. Migration challenges the congruency of citizenship and state territory, because migrants are able to create a sense of belonging to country of destination as well as origin simultaneously, and are capable to practice citizenship across national borders. Thereby, citizenship is not only to be understood as legal membership in a nation state or another collectivity (e.g. ethnic, religious, or regional groups) including specific rights and duties, but also in a republican sense, as active membership in civil society as well as “social citizenship” that includes access to cultural and economic resources (Marshall 1950, Miller 2000).<sup>2</sup> In a transnational context, active membership in migrant civil society is expressed through collective transborder belonging, transnational organization, and civil commitment in country of residence as well as in country of origin. Transnational civil commitments of migrant communities can range from social development initiatives in hometowns (Gonzalez Gutierrez 1995), direct investments (Massey/Parrado 1994) and know-how transfers (Thränhardt 2005) to political exercises of influence by campaigning or lobbying (Itzigsohn et al. 1999), or practices through religious channels (Levitt 2001). These self-initiated transnational activities can be realized by migrant organizations through transnational sociocultural, political, and economic spaces simultaneously (see Portes 2003, Faist et al. 2013). In doing so, migrants sustain networks and relations that frequently cross national borders (Basch et al. 1994) which allow them to construct a sense of belonging to more than one community, and to practice and to negotiate citizenship in the new country of residence without losing citizenship in the country of origin. Thus, citizenship above national level arises, which is called “transnational citizenship” (Bauböck 1994) that is foremost based on cross-border multiple community membership, rights and duties, identity and belonging,

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<sup>1</sup> This paper draws on empirical findings that I gathered during fieldwork in the context of my dissertation. These findings were accomplished during two research stays at Princeton University (2011-2012) and at University of California, Los Angeles (2013) which were funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES).

<sup>2</sup> Linda Bosniak draws four components of citizenship: rights and duties (legal status), collective identity, and political activity or participation (2000).

and political participation that can include practices toward state institutions as well as activities in civil society in country of residence and of origin (see Bauböck 2006, Bauböck/Guiraudon 2009, Faist 1999, 2009).<sup>3</sup>

In general, transnational citizenship is negotiated between migrants and emigration states. In this process, initiatives of negotiation can be adopted by the migrant community themselves or by state. Here, migrant organizations as interlocutors can play an important role in the relationship between states and migrants (Thränhardt 2013: 5). Studies show that emigration states increasingly try to reach migrant organizations to keep or to reincorporate their emigrant population in the national community through negotiating the concept of cross-border citizenship. One of the emigration states' main interests is to use the potential of emigrants for development of underdeveloped regions (Thränhardt 2008, Candan/Hunger 2013). In this effort, some states are more successful than other. On the one hand, countries such as China (Ding 2007) or India (Hunger 2004, Naujoks 2013) recognize the value of diasporas for their contributions to development, and reincorporate their expatriates through overseas citizenship offerings, and on the other hand, countries such as Columbia (Bouvier 2007) or Cuba (Grugel/Kippin 2007) basically fail with their emigrant policies, because Colombian and Cuban migrants in the United States dissociate themselves from their countries of origin, and constructed migrant citizenship apart from their country of origin. At this, new forms of technology – foremost the Internet – deepen communication and collaboration between states and diasporas (Hunger/Kissau 2009, Hunger et al. 2011). Mexico, a typical emigration state, uses the Internet to supply emigrant services and implemented various rights and programs – such as dual nationality and foreign aid programs – to attract its emigrant citizens in the United States (Fitzgerald 2009), but with mixed success: Whereat some Mexican migrants ignore these initiatives and cut their connections to the Mexican state, do others take advantage of these Mexican rights and programs. Thereby, many Mexican mestizo (non-indigenous) migrants<sup>4</sup> accepted these governmental offerings and established permanent communication, cooperation as well as discourses with local or state institutions about their opportunities of political participation, including voting rights and lobbying, through their state-

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<sup>3</sup> Thereby, sense of belonging and involvement as active citizens of migrants in home country affairs depend on different determinants. These could be spatial concentration, time frame of migration, level of organization, cross-border networks, financial and social resources, or political situation in home country (Portes/Guarnizo/Haller 2003).

<sup>4</sup> The term *mestizo* is generally referring to people who have a European as well as pre-Columbian heritage, and usually do not speak an indigenous language. They dominate Mexican society that is based on the national idea of *mestizaje* which excludes indigenous people.

based migrant organizations. Prime examples are the efforts of classic Mexican emigration states of Zacatecas (Goldring 2002, Smith 2007) and Guanajuato (Smith 2003) vis-à-vis their migrant counterparts of state-based federations. Furthermore, Mexican migrants from the state of Michoacán negotiate transnational citizenship rather through their membership in the Catholic Church that is based on religious activities, and therefore, connects religious communities in the United States and in Mexico (Fitzgerald 2001).

In this sense, the question of transnational citizenship appears to be even more important when migration involves members of indigenous groups who are ethnically discriminated as well as politically and economically marginalized in countries of origin and – due to their illegal migrant status – in their adopted countries, and therefore, widely excluded from national citizenship in both countries. National exclusions restrict options of citizenship exertions. At the same time, participation in a transnational civil society through migrant organizations could offer them a serious opportunity to negotiate citizenship – that is primarily based on rights and duties, belonging, and political participation – by themselves in cooperation with partners below and above national levels. Thus, the central question of this paper is whether indigenous migrants actually organize to improve their social and political situation in country of destination as well as origin, and therefore, are able to negotiate and practice their self-determined citizenship in a transnational context. For this purpose, I would like to explore the case of an indigenous migrant community in the city of Los Angeles: Oaxaqueños<sup>5</sup> – composed of Zapotecos and Mixtecos – originally from the southern Mexican state of Oaxaca. The investigation of the Oaxacan indigenous community in Los Angeles provides a good case study of indigenous migrant citizenship because of four main reasons: 1) It is the largest urban indigenous migrant community with the longest history of migration in the United States; 2) Indigenous members of the community know and recognize each other as a cohesive and self-contained community; 3) They are very well organized in multi and differentiated migrant organizations; and most importantly, 4) They established a well institutionalized network, including links to other organizations and state institutions in the United States as well as in Mexico.

To approach the issue of citizenship negotiations of indigenous Oaxacan migrants in Los Angeles, I collected qualitative data through document analysis published by state agencies and migrant organizations themselves (online and offline); 56 semi-structured interviews with

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<sup>5</sup> In the following, I will use the terms Oaxaqueños (Spanish) and Oaxacans (English) as synonyms. Both terms refer to migrants originally from Mexico's Southern state of Oaxaca.

leaders and members of twelve selected migrant organizations, former members, non-organized migrants as well as representatives of political institutions; and participant observations at migrant festivities, board meetings, member meetings, workshops, church services as well as meetings between migrant organizations and political institutions. Additionally, I analyzed quantitative data based on statistics about indigenous remittances provided by institutions of the Mexican and Oaxacan governments.<sup>6</sup> Before I will analyze organization, belonging, and opportunities of citizenship negotiation of Oaxaqueños in Los Angeles, I will describe the general sociopolitical situation of indigenous people in Oaxaca and migrants in the United States.

## 2. Context of Indigenous Migration from Oaxaca to the United States

### *Indigenous People in Oaxaca*

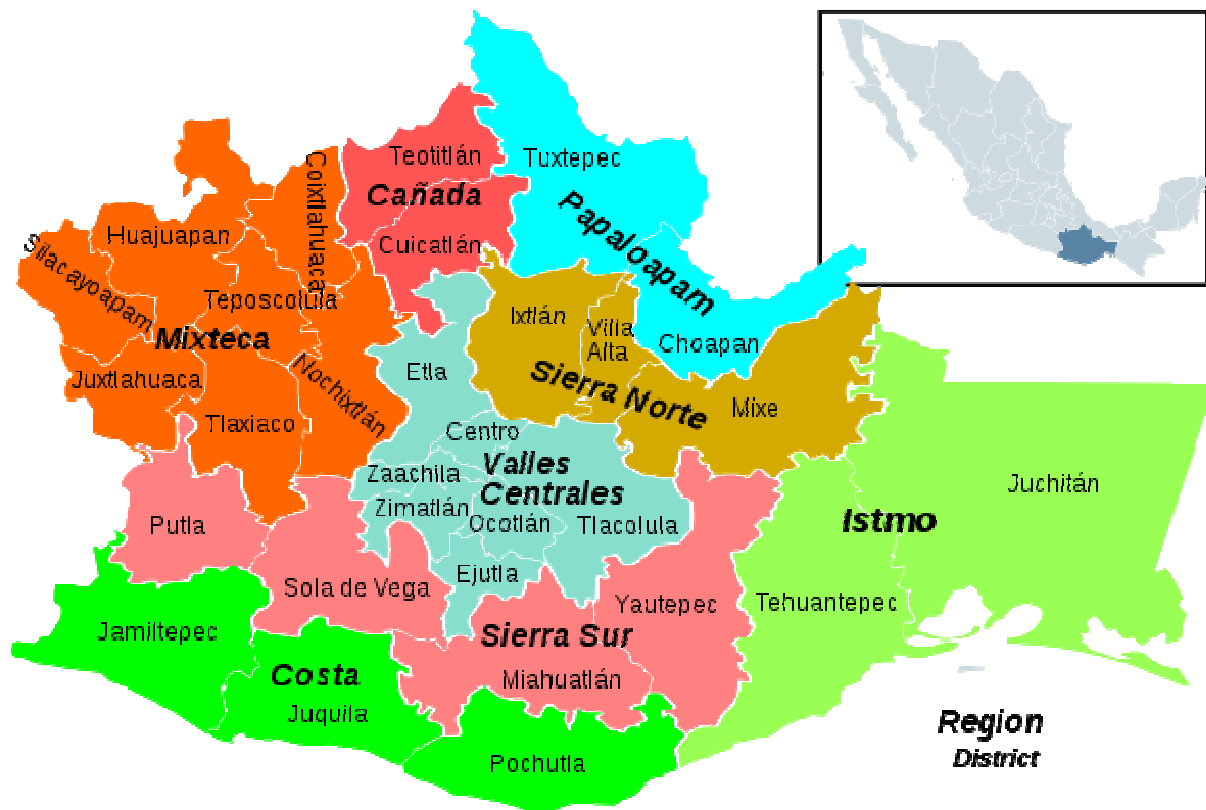
In Mexico, indigenous population consists of more than twelve million – among them are larger groups such as Nahuas, Mayans, Zapotecos, Purepechas, and Mixtecos – who speak at least 85 different languages and represent more than ten percent of the Mexican population (Rivera-Salgado 2005: 6). Oaxaca has the highest indigenous population of all Mexican states.

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<sup>6</sup> Data was collected during field research in the frame of my dissertation from November 2011 to June 2012, and from February to May 2013. Document analysis focused on documents and publications of the migrant organizations – such as bylaws, webpage articles, *facebook* entries as well as *youtube* films – political institutions, and newspapers. Semi-structured interview sample of migrant organizations includes all larger civic organizations – political, cultural, economic, and religious ones – and six additional HTA's in the greater Los Angeles area. Interviews with representatives of political institutions included the Mexican consulate, *Secretaría de Desarrollo Social* (SEDESOL), and *Centro Oaxaca* in Los Angeles. Interviews and participant observations should give a deeper understanding of the relationship among Oaxacan migrant organizations, and between the Oaxacan migrant community and representatives of political institutions in Los Angeles as well as in Oaxaca. The interviews and observations were recorded in written and oral form. The transcripts and protocols were evaluated through joint analysis.



**Map 1: Regions of the State of Oaxaca within Mexico**



Source: Wikipedia 2013

Sixteen different indigenous groups amount more than one third of the Oaxacan population, whereat the Zapotecos and Mixtecos constitute the largest groups (*INEGI* 2010) who live primarily in the Sierra Norte, Valles Centrales, and Mixteca regions (see map 1). More than 400 of the 571 municipalities in Oaxaca consist of self-governed indigenous communities. In these autonomous communities, indigenous Oaxaqueños cultivate primarily local identities and practice local citizenship that is particularly expressed and institutionalized in *tequio* and *cargo* work as an important part of pre-Columbian *usos y costumbres* that can be understood as a kind of local self-governance and community work. Self-governance and work of appointed males ranks from monitoring local infrastructure projects to organizing community fiestas.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Cargos* are unpaid positions, civil or religious, that are held for one or two years by males appointed by community members in a rotating procedure. These traditions and practices are an important part of indigenous civil

This continued local orientation of indigenous people can be explained with their exclusion from the Mexican national agenda. From its beginning in the early nineteenth century, the Mexican state excluded indigenous people from its national state identity of *mestizaje* that is based on mestizo culture and heritage. Therefore, indigenous people do not enjoy full citizenship rights and have little access to economic resources in Mexico (Kearney 2000: 178). This is especially evident in Oaxaca: They have the lowest standard of housing, about one quarter of Oaxacan households do not have access to running water – in indigenous communities of San Juan Lachigalla and San Pedro Apóstol even less than one percent do have it –, in some communities more than 70 percent of its inhabitants have no electricity (e.g. San Juan Petlapa), and only eight percent of homes have internet access (SIPaz 2012a). Average schooling time is below seven years – among women even much lower – and almost 20 percent are illiterate and do not speak Spanish besides their indigenous language (INEGI 2010, CONAPO 2010a). The facts of bad medical care, long distances to the next sufficiently equipped hospitals, and the lack of doctors (on average, there is only one doctor per 1,000 indigenous inhabitants) exemplify health dilemmas of indigenous communities in Oaxaca (SIPaz 2012a). Poor living standards are also reflected by the *Human Development Index* (HDI) of the United Nations which ranks Oaxaca with an index of 0.66 second last of all Mexican states (Mexican national HDI is about 0.75) (UNDP 2012). Oaxaca's GDP per capita is with about US\$4,000 per year the second lowest (only before Chiapas) of all Mexican states (average US\$9,750) (INEGI 2012).

In addition, indigenous people suffer from involvement in land conflicts. These land conflicts are in most cases results from absent legal regulation of land segmentation by the state government (SIPaz 2012b). State authorities, paramilitaries, or great land owners want to take advantage of absent state laws of indigenous land regulations, and try to incorporate indigenous land in their favor. They do not shrink back from using force against indigenous people, sometimes even with deadly results. A terrible example is the case of the indigenous Triqui community of San Juan Copala in Oaxaca where indigenous people were tortured and several community members and two human rights activists were assassinated by the paramilitary group *UBISORT* in the years after the indigenous community declared independence from the Oaxaca state (*El Tequio* 2010: 18). Up to the present, the conflict is not solved.

Issues of violent practices against indigenous rights were also addressed in the 2006 uprisings of a coalition of teachers, trade unions, peasants, students, and indigenous people, called the *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca (APPO)*, in Oaxaca City.<sup>8</sup> These different groups of protesters were united by one basic demand: instant termination of political suppression of the Oaxacan people by the ruling *PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional)* and resignation of Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz. The uprisings were violently defeated by the state police and paramilitary. At least 26 protestors were killed during the uprisings (*Ciudadana Express* 2008). Although Oaxaca City was in a state of emergency for months in the summer of 2006, the protesters had little success in realizing their demands. Ortiz ruled with an iron fist against indigenous people for four more years until the state election of 2010 which ended an 80 years long *PRI* domination in Oaxaca. These harsh, and sometimes brutal social, economic and legal circumstances make it very difficult for indigenous people to make a living from farming and other local professions (Kearney 2000: 178).<sup>9</sup> Therefore, many indigenous Oaxaqueños perceive emigration to the United States as a last resort.

#### *Indigenous Oaxacan Migrants in the United States*

Although higher numbers of indigenous Oaxaqueños left their homes already in the context of the *Bracero* program<sup>10</sup> in the 1960s, the largest and mainly undocumented migrant waves from Oaxaca to the United States occurred in the 1980 and '90s (Fox/Rivera-Salgado 2004: 2). Currently, Oaxaqueños – primarily Zapotecos and Mixtecos – amount one of the largest indigenous Mexican migrant groups in the United States. They moved to almost all states in the United States, but most of them migrated to California where they could easily find jobs in agricultural businesses in rural areas as well as in the service industry in urban settings. It is estimated that there live about 400,000 indigenous Oaxacan migrants in the United States, therefrom about 250,000 in California: about 165,000 Mixtec farmworkers in rural areas (*IFS* 2010) and about 80,000 Zapotecs in urban areas (Kissam 2012). The cities or regions with

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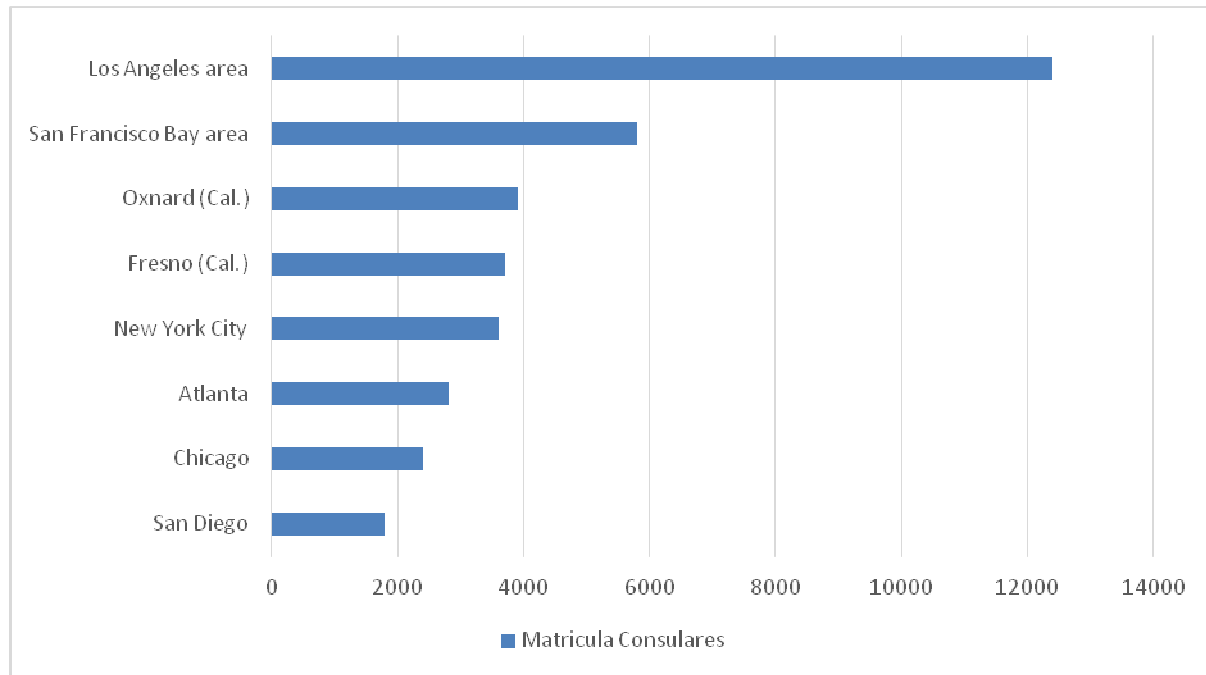
<sup>8</sup> Indigenous leaders joined the *APPO* movement from the beginning to show solidarity with Oaxacan teachers and trade unions, and to call attention to their own poor socio-economic situation in rural communities.

<sup>9</sup> In Mexico, the neoliberal policies during the presidencies of Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988) and Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) downgraded bad economic and social long-term conditions of indigenous people additionally. This became especially evident in the transformation of agrarian economy, the termination of import substitution industrialization, constitutional change of indigenous land protection, and *NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement)* implementations on local farmers in 1994 (Delgado-Wise/Márquez Covarrubias 2007). Especially rural indigenous people who depend on agriculture still suffer from these policies.

<sup>10</sup> The *Bracero* program was a bilateral agreement for guest workers from Mexico to fill gaps in the US labor market (1942-1964). Of the 4.5 million participating Mexican workers in the program, about 3.5 percent were originally from Oaxaca (Alvarado Juárez 2007: 86).

the most issued *Matricula Consulares*<sup>11</sup> by Mexican Consulates to undocumented Oaxacan immigrants in the United States are pictured in chart 1. These numbers give an indication about the largest Oaxacan communities in the United States.

**Chart 1: Numbers of Issued *Matricula Consulares* to Oaxacan immigrants by Mexican Consulates in the United States until 2011**



Source: Chart created by the author, data from IME (Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior) 2011

As undocumented workers, they fill important gaps on the labor market, mainly in agriculture, building, gardening, hotel, and restaurant sector. Despite relatively low wages and bad working conditions, they are at least able to earn distinct higher wages in the United States than in Oaxaca. According the *Indigenous Farmworkers Study (IFS)*, some indigenous migrant farmer are even able to earn up to nine Dollars per hour in California (*IFS* 2010: 58). Relatively stable incomes enable them to organize collectively around specific community issues to improve their current socio-political situation as undocumented migrants. At this, indigenous Oaxaqueños do not organize with Mexican mestizo migrants, but rather as self-contained indigenous migrant groups. Because of discrimination and marginalization by the dominant ethnic mainstream society (Portes 1999), they constructed a more pan-indigenous

<sup>11</sup> The *Matrícula Consular* is an identification card issued by Mexican consulates to Mexican migrants. One main purpose of the *Matrícula Consular* is to provide undocumented migrants with identification documents.

identity in differentiation to mestizo Mexican migrants to organize around issues of indigenous rights and hometown developments (see Kearney 2000, Fox/Rivera-Salgado 2004, Velasco Ortiz 2005, Fox 2006). Therefore, they established mainly HTA's to maintain links to local indigenous communities of origin (López et al. 2001, Kearney/Besserer 2004), or political organizations to articulate indigenous interests in contrast to mestizo migrant organizations in the United States as well as Mexico (see Fox/Rivera-Salgado 2004, Rivera-Salgado 2005, Stephen 2007: 231ff., Bacon 2013: 41ff.).

### 3. Case Study: Indigenous Oaxaqueños in Los Angeles

#### 3.1 Organization and Belonging of the Community

##### *Hometown Associations*

Los Angeles is the city with the highest concentration of indigenous Latin migrants in the United States. More than 70,000 indigenous Oaxaqueños live in Los Angeles: 52,000 immigrants plus 17,000 US-born children of indigenous immigrants from Oaxaca (Kissam 2012).<sup>12</sup> Over the last decades, Oaxacan migrants established a vital community with a diverse landscape of migrant organizations in Los Angeles.

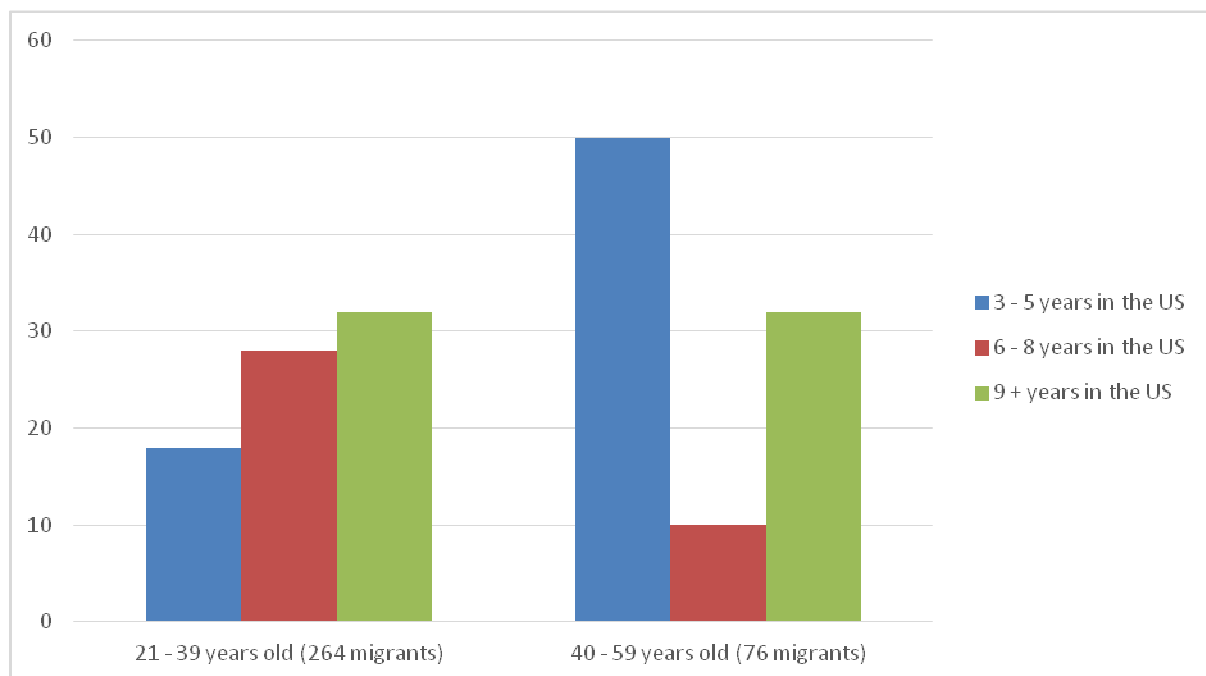
First of all, starting in the 1960s, indigenous migrants from same hometowns of origin came together to create hometown-based migrant organizations in Los Angeles. Similar to Mexican mestizo hometown associations (HTA's), membership in indigenous HTA's constitute local belonging and express local identity rooted in their hometowns of origin. Based on this self-awareness of local belonging, they started to create cultural and socio-economic links to their hometowns and contributed to local development of infrastructure. Sustained sense of belonging, membership in hometowns of origin through participation in HTA's, and care for communal development in towns of origin express the basis of translocal citizenship of Oaxaqueños. Additionally, these strong indigenous networks are fostered by the aforementioned *usos y costumbres*, in which not only stayed at home community members but also migrants located in the United States have to participate. At this, migrants need to stay in permanent contact with the home community, and have to support it through material or intel-

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<sup>12</sup> In Los Angeles, Oaxacan migrants live predominantly in the central LA neighborhoods of Koreatown, Pico Union, and South Central as well as Santa Monica.

lectual remittances, which are used for community projects. In some cases, selected migrants are even appointed by hometown leaders to remigrate for one or more years to fulfill leadership positions (*tequio*) or community work (*cargo*). If migrants refuse to do so, they can be sanctioned by hometown committees, and in the worst case even lose their private property in hometown. According to the survey of the *IFS* (2010: 49), achieved *cargo* work and other obligations in hometowns do not decline but rather increase after longer residence in California among younger indigenous farmworkers (see chart 2). These obligations institutionalize transnational citizenship and provide long-term links between communities of destination and of origin.

**Chart 2: Percentage of Indigenous Farmworkers in California Who Did *Cargo* in Oaxaca in the Last Five Years, Itemized in Age and Length of Stay of Migrants**



Source: Chart created by the author, data from *IFS* 2010: 49

For example, interviewed members of the oldest still existing indigenous Oaxacan HTA's in Los Angeles – the *Organizacion para la Ayuda Macuiltianguises (OPAM)*<sup>13</sup>, founded in 1980, and the *Comunidad de Tlacolula (COTLA)*, founded in 1981 – got appointed by local indige-

<sup>13</sup> It is remarkable that there live more Zapotec migrants from the hometown of San Pablo Macuiltianguis in Los Angeles (about 2,000 migrants) than Zapotec people remained in San Pablo Macuiltianguis (about 1,000 people).

nous town officials to remigrate to their hometowns in Oaxaca for about one or two years to do *cargo* work. Some of them even lived already for over twenty years in Los Angeles. Here, one did a job as an *Agente Municipal* to rebuild water tanks, to do maintenance work for roads, try to get electrical power into certain parts of the town which did not have electricity, and to take care of clean water supply (interview with *OPAM* member). Another member of *OPAM* did even two years of *cargo* work in an elementary school in his original hometown. To do this job he took care for all of his travel expenses – plane ticket, food, accommodation, and other costs – by himself (interview with *OPAM* member). In return, they keep their full co-determination and voting rights in local elections as well as full property rights. In this sense, indigenous communities adapted to new transnational realities and expanded the *usos y costumbres* to migrants living in the United States, and therefore, extended local community membership across national borders. Indigenous migrants enjoy full citizenship based on membership, rights, and duties in hometown communities. Therefore, in the case of indigenous HTA's, members feel strongly connected with their hometown in Oaxaca, which is expressed in the practices of *usos y costumbres* that constitutes a substantive community membership. Currently, community members estimate that there are more than 100 indigenous Oaxacan HTA's in Los Angeles (interviews with members of Oaxacan HTA's in Los Angeles).

### *Broader Civic Migrant Organizations*

Additionally to HTA's, indigenous Oaxaqueños in Los Angeles created broader civic or issue-focused migrant organizations<sup>14</sup> in the greater Los Angeles area starting at the end of the 1980s. They established broader organizations to address their specific needs and challenges which became more complex and socially all-embracing. Each broader civic migrant organization focuses on specific subjects that are of particular relevance for the indigenous migrant community. Table 1 gives an overview of six selected issue-focused civic organizations in chronological order of their establishment:

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<sup>14</sup> I call these organizations “broader civic migrant organizations” because their focus goes beyond local hometown subjects of traditional HTA's. Therefore, I draw a clear distinction between HTA's and “broader civic migrant organizations” in this paper.

**Table 1: Selected Indigenous Oaxacan Civic Migrant Organizations in the Greater Los Angeles Area by Name, Type, Year of Creation, Ethnic Component, and Objectives**

Name	Type	Year of creation	Ethnic component	Main objectives
<i>Organización Regional de Oaxaca (ORO)</i>	Oaxacan state-based cultural organization	1988	Zapotec and Mixtec	culture/politics/development
<i>Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales (FIOB)</i>	political association	1991	Mixtec, Zapotec, Triqui, Purépecha, and non-indigenous	politics/education/development
<i>Federación Oaxaqueña de Clubes y Organizaciones Indígenas en California (FOCOICA)</i>	Oaxacan state-based federation	2001	Zapotec	development/culture/politics
<i>Ministerio de la Virgen de Juquila (MVJ)</i>	religious migrant organization	2004	Zapotec, Mixtec and mestizo Mexican	religion/culture/politics
<i>Asociación Oaxaqueña de Negocios (AON)</i>	entrepreneurial association	2005	Zapotec and mestizo Mexican	business/culture/education
<i>Instituto Oaxaca (InstOax)</i>	educational organization	2007	Zapotec and non-Mexican	education/culture/development

Source: Issued by Author

The first broader and still existing civic organization was the *Organización Regional de Oaxaca (ORO)*. *ORO* is a regional-based organization that was founded in 1988 by leaders of different Zapotec HTA's to preserve their indigenous culture in urban Los Angeles. Three years later, in 1991, Mixtec and Zapotec leaders, including members of *ORO*, realized that it is also important to organize around political issues to improve social living conditions of indigenous people. Therefore, they founded the *Frente Indígena de Organizaciones Binacionales (FIOB)* to advocate human and civil rights for indigenous people in the United States and in Mexico. *FIOB* is a truly transnational political organization, institutionalized with offices in different cities and towns in California – Los Angeles, Fresno, Santa Maria, and San Diego – as well as in Oaxaca and Tijuana. Primarily, *ORO* and *FIOB* were founded to maintain indigenous culture and to face discrimination and exploitation of any specific indigenous Oaxacan group, and therefore contributed – in contrast to locally focused HTA's – to the formation of a pan-Oaxacan belonging.

In the last ten years, the Oaxacan community developed further and got even more institutionalized through the creation of more issue-based organizations. In 2001, members of about 30 HTA's and dance groups as well as leaders of *ORO* and *FIOB* founded the Oaxa-



can state-based federation called *Federación Oaxaqueña de Clubes y Organizaciones Indígenas en California (FOCOICA)* to establish a strategic counterpart to the Oaxacan government. The idea behind that was to improve communication with the Oaxacan government and to contribute – in addition to collective activities through HTA's – to the socio-economic development of indigenous communities in Oaxaca. Other broader issue-based migrant organizations were created in the following years: In 2004, the *Ministerio de la Virgen de Juquila (MVJ)* which is a religious organization based on Catholic faith to address religious concerns of the Oaxacan community. In 2005, indigenous Oaxacan business owners established the *Asociación Oaxaqueña de Negocios (AON)* to support indigenous businesses in Los Angeles as well as in Oaxaca. In 2007, indigenous migrants founded the *Instituto Oaxaca (InstOax)* with the specific aim to contribute to education of the second generation of indigenous migrants.

These diverse acting organizations compose the core of the indigenous Oaxacan civil society in Los Angeles. Leaders and members of these organizations communicate and collaborate with each other as well as other organizations, businesses and institutions, including Oaxacan state offices, such as the *Instituto de Oaxaqueño de Atención al Migrante (IOAM)* in Oaxaca and the *Centro Oaxaca* in Los Angeles, which were especially established by the Oaxacan state to deal with indigenous migrants abroad. Over the last 25 years, creation of these specific issue-focused migrant organizations contributed to institutionalization and professionalization of organized indigenous migrants. They reflect how indigenous migrants grew from an unorganized, exploited and discriminated ethnic victim group in the 1970s and '80s to pride, self-confident, and socio-culturally active stakeholders nowadays:

„There was a lot of discrimination of indigenous Oaxacans in the past, especially among other Mexicans. They had a misperception of Oaxaca [...] they thought we are just little, dark, non-Spanish speaking people with no history and culture [...] they discriminated us because of these stereotypes [...] Now they have learned more about us, and they realized that we have a long proud history and a very diverse culture which differs even from indigenous community to community in Oaxaca” (quotation of an interview with a leader of *ORO*).

„Now, we have strong organizations. We are also stronger and more successful in business now [...] others recognize that very well [...] also politicians from Oaxaca and LA recognized that [...] and our kids are getting prider to be Oaxacans, and they go back to Oaxaca to visit their grandparents in Oaxaca [...] they are getting more aware of their indigenous Oaxacan culture [...] these are huge changes in our community in the last years” (quotation of an interview with a leader of *ORO*).

Through the establishment and institutionalization of broader civic migrant organizations, indigenous Oaxaqueños created a sense of pan-indigenous belonging above local hometown level. Furthermore, these broader migrant organizations open transnational spaces to practice and to negotiate citizenship. To approach the process of citizenship negotiation in a transnational context, I will analytically distinguish in the following between transnational sociocultural, political, and economic spaces. Even these spaces are overlapping and complementary in reality, I'm starting to explain negotiation efforts in transnational sociocultural spaces. Not because these are the qualitative and quantitative most relevant ones, but because these were practiced first by the indigenous Oaxacan community in Los Angeles. After this, I will go on to describe the relevance of political and economic practices for transnational citizenship building.

### 3.2 Citizenship Negotiation in Transnational Spaces

#### *Transnational Sociocultural Spaces*

The first analytical dimension of transnational indigenous citizenship is based on sociocultural matters. Foremost, Oaxaqueños in Los Angeles fill transnational sociocultural spaces through cultural, educational, and religious activities. In practice, the indigenous Oaxacan community maintain their cultural heritage through traditional festivities – including music and dance performances as well as food selling –, exhibitions, religious events, indigenous language workshops and more. These cultural activities are mostly practiced simultaneously in both states California and Oaxaca, and therefore extend traditional cultural citizenship from indigenous sending communities in Oaxaca to satellite communities in the United States. Festivities where many members of the same community come together symbolize belonging and demonstrate citizenship as a real experience of active membership in the community. The oldest and most famous indigenous migrant festival in Los Angeles is the *Guelaguetza*. The *Guelaguetza* is organized every year in August by ORO since 1988, and attracted in some years more than 10,000 visitors. Although the *Guelaguetza* is also performed by Zapotecs in Oaxaca as well as in other cities in the United States each year, the one in Los Angeles is the biggest *Guelaguetza* worldwide. Through the performance of traditional Zapotec dances and music, and the sales of indigenous products – like food, clothes, furniture, art, and other handcrafts – it contributes to the self-perception and shared identity of the Oaxa-

can community and to the visibility as an ethnic group to outsiders.<sup>15</sup> At this, *Guelaguetza* is more than just a “big party,” it has also a socio-political meaning to its members:

*“Guelaguetza means today I help you and tomorrow you help me [...] everyone will help each other, everyone will bring something, e.g. at wedding, or meeting with mayor [...] everyone brings something to help, food or money [...] as long as we help each other, we can’t get into existential trouble” (quotation of an interview with a leader of FOCOICA).*

In this sense, it can be understood as a codex for sharing and mutual help, and therefore, contributes to recognition of membership and belonging to the community. Therefore, participation in the *Guelaguetza* means to be a citizen of an ethnic community.<sup>16</sup>

Educational efforts are also an important part of community practices of indigenous people in Los Angeles. Increasingly, indigenous migrants understand education as an important key to succeed in a transnationalized world, especially to become self-confident and eloquent citizens who are able to articulate their rights and interests. To pursue education among its second migrant generation, Oaxaqueños created the educational migrant organization *InstOax* in 2007 to become more professionalized in a specific organization with a focus primarily on education (see chapter 3.1). *InstOax*, in cooperation with other organizations of the community, designed programs and projects to contribute to indigenous education, or lobby politicians to pass more migrant inclusive education laws, such as supporting the passage of the *California DREAM Act (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors)* in 2011, which allows undocumented children to apply for student financial aid in California. In addition to their claims for educational rights as an important part of citizenship of undocumented migrants, they also realize their own initiatives to support education of the indigenous youth. For instance, *InstOax* awards annually stipends to undocumented indigenous students who graduated with distinctions from high school and plan to study at a college or university in Los Angeles (*Impulso de Oaxaca* 2011). Furthermore, *InstOax* offers free after-school programs or workshops in indigenous languages as well as Spanish, English, sciences, or art.

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<sup>15</sup> Another cultural event of the indigenous Oaxacan community in Los Angeles is e.g. the *Festival de la Primavera* which is also a dance festival to celebrate spring and to crown the indigenous spring queen who is elected by community members out of different girls and women who usually present their HTA’s.

<sup>16</sup> Because of the important meaning of the *Guelaguetza* for Oaxacan migrants it attracts local LA politicians as well as representatives of the Oaxacan government to join the festival to emphasize the importance of indigenous cultural civil society. This can also be understood as a symbolization of the transnational migrant-state relationship.

To realize these workshops, they use rooms in public libraries or in Oaxacan stores in downtown Los Angeles. In connection of education and sports, *InstOax* created an exchange program with the *Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca (UABJO)* in Oaxaca City to organize frequent basketball tournaments among students from Los Angeles and Oaxaca. During trips to Oaxaca, indigenous students could learn about their cultural roots and the country of their ancestors through visits of museums and theaters. These activities should help to create an indigenous awareness and belonging to the indigenous Oaxacan community among the second and third migrant generations. Another important idea of supporting education of young people is to recruit future leaders for the indigenous community to ensure continuity of the indigenous Oaxacan community in Los Angeles (interview with a leader of *InstOax*).

Thirdly, religious activities also constitute an important part of citizenship in the Oaxacan community. They are mainly collectively practiced through the Catholic faith-based organization *Ministerio de la Virgen de Juquila (MVJ)*, which was founded to express the interests of religious members of the indigenous Oaxacan community in Los Angeles. This organization is named after the Virgin of Juquila (*Virgen de Juquila*)<sup>17</sup>. For migrant members of the *Ministerio*, the *Virgen de Juquila* that is portrayed in figures and paintings, symbolizes Christian hope of undocumented indigenous migrants and stands for demands of human and civil rights for indigenous people and migrants. A symbolic act of a member of the *Ministerio* illustrates the specific meaning of the virgin for the indigenous community in Los Angeles: He brought a 30 cm high figure of the Virgin of Juquila from Oaxaca to Los Angeles through crossing the US-Mexican border by foot from Tijuana to San Diego, as millions of undocumented indigenous migrants did before him. It should express solidarity among undocumented indigenous and non-indigenous migrants who share the experiences of dangerous border crossings, and calls for changing border policies that violate human rights of undocumented Mexican migrants. This symbolic act was celebrated in Los Angeles by a procession from central station to the church *Nuestra Señora Reyna de Los Angeles* in downtown by thousands of indigenous migrants in December 2011 and 2012 (*Latino California* 2012). The member of the *Ministerio* describes the political message:

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<sup>17</sup> The *Virgen de Juquila* is named after a place of pilgrimage in the Sierra Sur region of Oaxaca, the Zapotec village of Santa Catarina Juquila (see map 1).

*“I traveled to Oaxaca to the town of the holy virgin de Juquila called Santa Catarina Juquila to get the figure of the virgen and bring it to Los Angeles,[...] the idea was to go the same route with the virgin and to cross the border where many of my indigenous compatriots crossed the border in the past [...] and also to remember their troubles and painful experiences they had at the border [...] it was a holy act against forgetfulness and a call for dignity and respect for undocumented indigenous migrants in the US [...] the virgin should also protect future migrants crossing the border to the US [...] it should be regarded as the patron saint of indigenous migrants” (quotation from an interview with a member of the MVJ, translated from Spanish into English).*

These cultural, educational, and religious activities maintain or even improve their awareness as indigenous people and create citizenship based on belonging to a transnationalized indigenous community.

### *Transnational Political Spaces*

Organized Oaxaqueños practice political activities through transnational spaces to improve their socio-economic and political situation in communities of destination as well as origin. At this, their main political instruments are: political mobilization, lobbying, political education, and direct political participation. These tasks are expressed in concrete political actions primarily conducted by the political indigenous migrant organization *FIOB*.<sup>18</sup> Political transnationalism of the community in Los Angeles goes back to the indigenous uprisings in Chiapas (Zapatista movement) in the 1990s, and later to the *APPO* uprisings in Oaxaca in 2006 (see chapter 2). They supported these uprisings and demanded governmental protection of autonomous indigenous communities and no military interventions in local indigenous interests and concerns in Mexico. Here, indigenous people accounted the *PR*I state government as a main factor for indigenous suppression in Mexico. They organized protests in front of Mexican consulates, broadcasted trilingual political radio shows in different Californian cities – in English, Spanish, and Mixtec – to announce these conflicts, and established demonstration offices connected to *FIOB* offices in California and Oaxaca. At this, several *FIOB* members became official members of *APPO*, and some even took political offices in Oaxaca as mayors or regional representatives. A prime example is a school teacher from the Oaxacan

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<sup>18</sup> The official slogan of *FIOB* „Por el respeto a los derechos de los pueblos indigenas” (For the Respect of Rights of Indigenous People (*FIOB* 2013) reflects the unifying subject of political equality of indigenous Oaxaqueños.

village Tecomaxtlahuaca: First, he was the *FIOB* coordinator in Oaxaca, became later the mayor of his hometown, and afterwards a member of the Oaxaca Chamber of Deputies (*New America Media* 2008). He became the role model for many *FIOB* activists to reach similar political success, and shape local politics through direct policy-making in the interest of indigenous people.

The strong disaffection of the indigenous migrant community with the Oaxacan state policy continued until the government election in 2010, in which indigenous migrant organizations supported actively the opposition candidate of a party coalition named the *Peace and Progress Coalition* (composed of *PAN*, *PRD*, *PT*, and *Convergencia*), Gabino Cué, who was running against the *PRI* candidate Eviel Perez Magaña. Oaxacan migrant leaders established an election campaign office in LA, organized campaign events and meetings, and published campaign letters. Including votes of the Oaxacan diaspora in the United States, Cué could become the first non-*PRI* governor in Oaxaca in 2010 for almost 80 years. A coalition consisted of *ORO*, *FIOB*, *AON*, *MVJ*, *InstOax* and *FOCOICA* and other smaller Oaxacan migrant organizations organized his election campaign in Los Angeles in summer 2010. During this campaign, Cué declared the indigenous Oaxacan community as the ninth region of Oaxaca (*Ciudadania Express* 2010). Oaxacan migrant organizations in Los Angeles even negotiated a written commitment with Cué that should improve their transnational Oaxacan citizenship. Some migrant leaders call it even a contract between the governor candidate and the Oaxacan diaspora in Los Angeles. Cué signed the commitment to fulfill seven basic demands of Oaxacan migrants if he would become governor: a) opening of a state office in Los Angeles to improve on-site support of indigenous migrants, b) promotion of a binational Chamber of Commerce to facilitate trade of goods between Oaxaca and California, c) moral and material support of the *Guelaguetza* festival in Los Angeles, d) increased participation of the Oaxacan government in the 3x1 program<sup>19</sup>, e) support of rights of indigenous people in Mexico and the United States, f) the establishment of a *diputado migrante* (migrant representative) in the Oaxacan parliament, and g) employment of an indigenous migrant leader as director of the government agency for migrant issues (*IOAM*) (*Impulso de Oaxaca* 2010). Three years after Cué became governor of Oaxaca, some of the claims of the indigenous migrants are realized. The two most important ones are the establishment of an Oaxacan

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<sup>19</sup> The 3x1 program was established by the Mexican state in 2001 to stimulate collective development projects in Mexico through Mexican migrant organizations. In this program, Mexican state institutions pay three US-Dollars for every transferred US-Dollar from migrant organizations to hometowns in Mexico: One Dollar from the Mexican federal government, one Dollar from affected state, and one Dollar from affected municipality.

state office for migrant issues called *Centro Oacaxa* in Los Angeles, which was opened in summer of 2012, and commissioning of directorship of the *IOAM* (government agency for migrant issues) by Rufino Dominguez (a former *FIOB* migrant leader in California for decades). These first arrangements of the new government to accommodate indigenous migrants in California contribute to further institutionalization of transnational political spaces between Los Angeles and Oaxaca. This transnational institutionalization of indigenous migrant issues permits a permanent political dialog between the indigenous Oaxacan community in the United States – especially in Los Angeles – and the new government of Oaxaca, and therefore contributes to transnationalization of indigenous citizenship. Nevertheless, some other demands of indigenous migrants, such as the implementation of a migrant seat in the Oaxacan state parliament, are not accomplished yet.

Further initiatives to build self-confident citizenship in the Oaxacan community are the transnational *MIEL* (*Mujeres Indigenas en Liderazgo, Indigenous Women in Leadership*) workshops, which are organized by *FIOB* and realized in indigenous communities in Los Angeles and other Californian cities as well as in Oaxacan communities. The workshops aim to contribute to empowerment of indigenous women to become strong community citizens and female migrant leaders (*El Tequio* 2013).<sup>20</sup> Oaxacan indigenous migrants also collaborate with the city of LA to improve citizenship in the community of Los Angeles. That includes, for example, collaborations with the Los Angeles Police Department to organize the „LA Night Out“ – a nightly tour to demonstrate for a safer neighborhood – and to arrange the so-called „cultural sensitivity workshops“ to teach the police about fragile life situations of indigenous migrants, and how to use interpreters in dealing with indigenous migrants who do neither speak English nor Spanish. Thereby, they are also supported by local public offices and politicians of the LA city council through spatial support (e.g. provision of public places for events) and mutual visitations (e.g. holding speeches at political rallies).

### *Transnational Economic Spaces*

Oaxaqueños in Los Angeles aim to contribute to the improvement of indigenous communities through transnational economic spaces particularly by collective remittances and hometown improvements, economic long-term development projects, direct investment, business pro-

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<sup>20</sup> The women leadership program *MIEL* in Oaxacan communities is supported by the German *Rosa Luxemburg Foundation*.

jects, and granting business loans. Concrete examples are the developmental efforts of the Oaxacan federation *FOCO/CA*. Through its hometown-based member organizations – currently 18 HTA's – *FOCO/CA* provides an organizational platform to exchange experiences and ideas among migrant leaders about the improvement of economic development in Oaxaca (bylaws of *FOCO/CA* 2011). It is the only broader civic migrant organization of Oaxaqueños in Los Angeles that participates in the 3x1 program, including its HTA members. Realized development projects are public infrastructure improvements, such as road pavements, restorations of hospitals or schools, cleansing of parish halls, building of market places, or establishment of internet cafés. One of the most expensive development projects through the 3x1 program was a project realized by a member HTA called *Organización Santiago Matatlan*. In a US\$100,000 school bus project in the Zapotec town of Matatlan in Oaxaca, the HTA contributed US\$25,000 for that project which were collected among its members. Altogether, Oaxacan migrant organizations in the United States realized about 400 collective hometown development projects with an amount of 350 million Pesos total (about US\$ 30 million) in the years from 2002 to 2011 (*SEDESOL in Propuesta Oaxaca.com* 2012). Development projects in hometowns in the years from 2007 to 2011 are listed in table 2:

**Table 2: Amounts and Costs of 3x1 Projects in Oaxaca from 2007 to 2011**

Year	Projects	Value (in Mex. Pesos)
2007	38	32,000,000
2008	-	-
2009	51	59,000,000
2010	53	66,000,000
2011 (1. half)	39	58,000,000

Source: *SEDESOL* 2011

These amounts of collective HTA remittances is a small contribution compared to classic emigration states in Mexico. For instance, the migrant organizations of the classic emigration state of Zacatecas realized about 300 projects for about 220 million Pesos (17 million US Dollar) only in 2012 (*SEDESOL in NTR Zacatecas* 2013). One reason of this relatively reluctant participation of the indigenous diaspora in governmental programs is the still existing skepticism of indigenous migrants towards the Mexican government. This comprehensible skepticism is based on their experiences of governmental discrimination and suppression, which was also the main reason of their emigration to the United States. In contrast, individ-



ual private remittances among indigenous migrants from Oaxaca are much higher than their collective remittances, because they deprive from any control by the Mexican state. On average, Oaxacan migrants remitted about US\$225 per month to households in Oaxaca (Cohen 2010: 155). Table 3 shows that total migrant remittances to families in Oaxaca increased considerably between 1995 and 2012 from US\$160 million to US\$1.37 billion (*Banco de México* 2013a, 2013b) which makes more than ten percent of the Oaxacan GDP nowadays. Actually, Oaxaca registers one of the highest increases in remittances of all Mexican states in the last years. It ranks as number six of all 32 Mexican states (including federal district) only behind the classic emigration states of Michoacán, Guanajuato, Jalisco, México State, and Puebla (CONAPO 2010b: 30, Banco de México 2013b).

**Table 3: Family Remittances of Selected Mexican States, Including Oaxaca**

Mexican State	Family Remittances (in million US\$)							
	1995		2003		2009		2012	
	Absolute	relative	absolute	Relative	absolute	relative	absolute	relative
1. Michoacán	597	16.2	1,779	11.8	2,133	10.1	2,209	9.8
2. Guanajuato	376	10.2	1,403	9.3	1,945	9.2	2,138	9.5
3. Jalisco	467	12.7	1,345	8.9	1,716	8.1	1,883	8.4
4. Mexico State	161	4.4	1,112	7.4	1,715	8.1	1,563	7.0
5. Puebla	178	4.8	805	5.4	1,305	6.2	1,403	6.3
<b>6. Oaxaca</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>771</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>1,204</b>	<b>5.7</b>	<b>1,366</b>	<b>6.1</b>
National	3,673	100	15,041	100	21,181	100	22,438	100

Source: Banco de México 2013a, 2013b

Additionally, Oaxaqueños also conduct multiple self-initiated collective projects and programs to stimulate economic development of citizens of indigenous communities without cooperating with the Mexican government. One of these projects is the so-called *El Derecho a No Migrar* (the right not to migrate, but to stay at home) initiated by *FIOB*. The idea of this long-term project, which is conducted since 2008, is to expand rights of indigenous people through establishing more economic opportunities in their communities of origin in a more structured manner with a focus on agriculture. This project is coordinated through *FIOB* offices in both states California and Oaxaca, and by *FIOB* and other activists who supervise the realization directly on-site in more than 20 rural indigenous communities in Oaxaca. The long-run plan is to upgrade the project to a regional level where they create regional councils

and cooperatives to exchange experiences about the local implementations of the project, and to create a sustainable institutionalization of participating community citizens. At this, the project is also supported by relative HTA's in California which want to increase their contributions to development of their hometowns by financial and intellectual remittances in a more systematic way. Through participation in this project, local indigenous people become more self-confident in mastering economic challenges by themselves (interview with a leader of FIOB, Rivera-Salgado 2013).

Indigenous businesses compose another important part of the Oaxacan community in Los Angeles. Through importing indigenous goods from Oaxaca and selling them in Los Angeles, indigenous entrepreneurs promote economic links to hometowns. That makes them important advocates of membership building in the transnational community. Therefore, the indigenous migrant organization AON (an organization consisting primarily of Zapotec business owners) focuses on supporting indigenous businesses:

*"We aim to enforce Oaxacan businesses in California to be more competitive with other businesses [...], so far Oaxaqueños have more than 180 businesses in Los Angeles, restaurants, car repair stores, cloth stores, part supplies, mini markets, craft stores" (quotation from an interview with a leader of AON).*

In doing so, they promote the idea of *Oaxacatown* which was initiated by the migrant organization ORO, to create an officially recognized Oaxacan neighborhood in Los Angeles:

*"Many of our people want to start businesses, but they don't know how to fill out the papers to apply for business [...] So in Oaxacatown, in the corridor, they know where to go and to find support at other businesses which are already established. Businesses will be easier to recognize [...] also for tourists, the city will advertise the corridor, and people will look especially for the corridor and will find it. [...] it will be easier for people to do business, and new ones will be stimulated to start their businesses [...] Also the businesses will be from different towns in Oaxaca [...] and for them having their businesses next to each other stimulates our understanding as a common indigenous Oaxacan community in Los Angeles" (quotation from an interview with a leader of ORO).*

*"We need a corridor to support our businesses [...] it would also further increase our self-confidence and pride and bring us more together as a community [...] for our economic situation it would be a boost, because we could advertise our community and businesses much better because we would have a special name and place [...] people would associate us with a name and place [...] also it would motivate other Oaxaqueños to start businesses and to move to our Oaxaca corridor, called Oaxacatown [...] and we could support each other much*

*better, because we would concentrate in a special area [...] we support the idea of Oaxacatown, and ORO which initiated it, and FIOB, and other smaller organizations as well” (quotation from an interview with a leader of AON).*

Oaxacan indigenous leaders received the idea of *Oaxacatown* from other ethnic neighborhoods which are already established historic districts in the greater Los Angeles area, such as *Chinatown*, *Koreatown*, or *Philipinotown*. Oaxaqueños applied for official registration as an historic district at the LA city council in spring 2013. If the Oaxacan community gets its neighborhood officially recognized as a historic landmark, Oaxaqueños expect more visibility and recognition of their ethnic uniqueness as a part of the multi-ethnic city of Los Angeles (*La Opinión* 2012). On the one hand, an officially recognized neighborhood should improve commercialization of indigenous goods produced in Oaxaca and sold by indigenous businesses located in the neighborhood, and therefore, contribute to strengthening of economic links to hometowns and to economic development in Oaxaca. On the other hand, the aspiration for an officially recognized neighborhood reflects the increasing self-understanding as citizens of a migrant community in Los Angeles. The fact that *Oaxacatown* would be the first historic district of an ethnic group without an own nation state underscores the prominent standing of Oaxaqueños, and therefore, would become a symbol of a self-contained transnational indigenous migrant community.

### 3.3 Revaluation of Indigenous Citizenship in Los Angeles and Oaxaca

Due to accomplishing multi-purpose sociocultural, political, and economic transnational activities through broader civic migrant organizations, indigenous Oaxacan migrants in Los Angeles were able to establish social free spaces to develop as an indigenous community. What indigenous Oaxaqueños could not accomplish as economically marginalized and politically excluded people in Oaxaca, became only possible through their emigration to the United States: Revaluation of indigenous citizenship through increased opportunities of participation in civil society. Indigenous migrants in Los Angeles took advantage of these opportunities and invented innovative collective strategies to claim equal rights for indigenous people. These claimed rights range from voting rights and rights of assembly – including the right to perform their traditional festivities in public places – to the right of access to education. These are rights which are restricted to indigenous people in most parts of Oaxaca. Interestingly, because many indigenous migrants are not just undocumented in the United States, but also do not have received their own birth certificates in Mexico, indigenous migrants can be perceived as “undocumented people in their country of residence as well as in the country of

origin” (*quotation from an interview with a leader of FIOB*). To tackle that problem, indigenous migrant leaders agitated for issuing birth certificates to undocumented migrants at the Oaxacan government. The Oaxacan government under the new governor of Gabino Cué agreed, and arranged to issue birth certificates at the newly established Oaxacan migrant office *Centro Oaxaca* in Lynwood, Los Angeles (interview with Oaxacan government official, *Centro Oaxaca*, *Oaxaca.gob* 2013a). That fact illustrates how indigenous Oaxacans had not been perceived as citizens by their own government in country of origin before they migrated to the United States.

Through transnational efforts, the indigenous migrant community in Los Angeles does not only contribute to the revaluation of citizenship of indigenous migrants in Los Angeles, but also to the revaluation of citizenship of indigenous people who live in Oaxaca. This becomes evident in numerous contributions and commitments of migrant organizations in local indigenous home communities which improve living conditions of indigenous people, including activities and programs which are mentioned above (see chapter 3.2). Collective remittances send by indigenous HTA's in Los Angeles help to improve infrastructure in communities of origin, such as community places, parks, churches, hospitals, internet cafés, and schools that also improve access to information and education. Furthermore, obligated participation of indigenous remigrants in communal governance (*tequio*) and *cargo* work – which goes far beyond contributions of Mexican mestizo migrants to their home communities – does not only contribute to communal infrastructure improvements, but also to local civil society building, because socially and politically engaged and skilled remigrants get involved in local political discourses and are able, for instance, to teach other members of the community how to articulate social and political interests, and how to defend civil rights. There are numerous cases where indigenous migrant leaders went back to realize workshops, such as *MIEL* (women leadership building workshop) or programs, such as *Derecho a No Migrar* (political and economic development program) which are conducted by *FIOB* over long periods of time in permanent instruction from migrant organizations in Los Angeles (see chapter 3.2). At the same time, many rural indigenous people also participate in these workshops and programs to improve their living conditions by introducing their own ideas.

Furthermore, the acceptance of important political leadership positions of returned migrants on the state level – such as Rufino Dominguez, former *FIOB* coordinator who became a member of the new government as director of the Institute of Oaxacan Migrant Affairs (*IOAM*) in 2010 – could determine citizenship of indigenous people, because they are directly involved in local decision-making that affect indigenous communities. The new Oaxacan government is to some extent accountable for civic inclusion of indigenous people on the

state level. The new governor Cué was brought into office by the votes – although there are no official numbers, it is assumed that most of Oaxacan migrants in the United States who participated in last state election voted for him (interviews with Oaxacan migrant leaders) – and campaigns of indigenous citizens in California as well as in Oaxaca. He advertised more civic rights for indigenous people in Oaxaca during his election campaign, and therefore is expected to improve the value of citizenship of indigenous people in Oaxaca. This was also a part of the “campaign contract” between migrant leaders in Los Angeles and governor candidate Cué (see chapter 3.2). One of his primary policy goals is to improve local citizenship of indigenous people by upgrading their self-sufficiency through increasing human rights protection and subsidizing agriculture production and local generation of energy. So far, his administration has passed 14 laws that affect directly or indirectly the rights of indigenous communities, including the Law of Defense of Human Rights in Oaxaca (*Ley de la Defensoría de los Derechos Humanos del Estado de Oaxaca*) – its main purpose was to establish an independent ombudsman's office in Oaxaca – and the Organic Law of the Executive Branch of the State of Oaxaca (*Ley Orgánica del Poder Ejecutivo del Estado de Oaxaca*) – which should improve dialog with Oaxacan civil society (*Peace Brigades International* 2013). Some of these laws were proposed and promoted by civil society, including the transnational indigenous migrant community. In addition to state laws, the state government initiated different agricultural programs to improve the well-being and self-sufficiency of indigenous communities, such as the program *Organic Oaxaca* to “provide new tools for cultivation, certification, and promotion of organic products, including coffee, mango, sesame seeds, vegetables, tamarind, honey, and rum” (*Oaxaca.gob* 2013b). This project is conducted since 2011 and involves almost all different indigenous groups in Oaxaca, including Zapotec and Mixtec communities (*Oaxaca.gob* 2013b). At this, some agricultural programs and initiatives are co-funded by the *InterAmerican Development Bank* and the development bank of Mexico *NAFIN* with an amount of US\$86 million (*Worldfolio* 2013). It seems like that Cué recognized that he can only reevaluate indigenous citizenship by improving local self-sufficiency of indigenous farm workers, because that is the most existential issue of indigenous citizens in Oaxaca. Improving their local well-being should give them a serious alternative to emigration. Nevertheless, it is still too early in his legislative period (only three out of six years so far) to tell how precisely his governorship will shape indigenous citizenship.

Because of these maintained and additionally established transnational links – including financial and intellectual transfers – indigenous people in Oaxaca recognize their family members and friends living in Los Angeles as a part of their own community, and therefore developed an awareness of transnational community belonging. Moreover, the aforementioned examples of transnational activities illustrate that dedicated leaders and members of migrant

organizations in the United States adopt the functions and obligations of the Mexican state, and advocate civil rights of indigenous citizens in Oaxaca and take care of the socio-economic development of their communities in large scales, and therefore, contribute to the improvement of transnational indigenous citizenship.

#### 4. Conclusion

The case of Oaxaqueños in Los Angeles shows that indigenous migrants from Mexico do organize to negotiate citizenship to improve their socio-economic and political situation in country of residence and origin. This transnational citizenship is based on community organization and belonging, political participation, indigenous rights and duties (manifested in indigenous *tequio* and *cargo* work), and constructed pan-indigenous identity. During an age-long struggle of indigenous people in Mexico, they could not recapture indigenous civic rights in their own country yet which they enjoyed in self-supporting communities before the conquest by the Spaniards in the sixteenth century. In fact, they were – and many indigenous people in Oaxaca who did not emigrate are still – politically and economically excluded in a mestizo dominated Mexican nation state. Only through emigration to the United States, indigenous Oaxacan people could build new living standards and acquire new resources and skills that are important to build indigenous civil society. They started to organize in diverse broader migrant organizations and constituted a self-confident, self-contained, and well institutionalized community in Los Angeles over the last 25 years, which is sustained by pan-indigenous Oaxacan belonging and identity. This well-organized community allows them to practice transnational activities, and furthermore, to negotiate citizenship not only through transnational political spaces, but sociocultural and economic spaces as well. These transnational negotiation activities, which connect indigenous migrants to their communities of origin in Oaxaca range from ethnic festivities, student exchange programs, and political lobbying and campaigns, to indigenous business relations and concrete infrastructure projects in home communities. Sometimes, that happens in cooperation with the government of Oaxaca. Whereat the Mexican nation state plays only a minor role, such as through occasional events or sporadic contacts between the Oaxacan migrant organizations and the Mexican consulate in Los Angeles in the framework of the *3x1 program*. In fact, transnational citizenship is predominantly negotiated on local level in cooperation with indigenous communities through HTA's and, increasingly in the last decades, on state level in cooperation and struggle with the state of Oaxaca through broader civic migrant organizations. Here, basic initiative to build transnational citizenship comes from the indigenous diaspora in Los Angeles instead from political counterparts in Mexico.

Nevertheless, a comparison to other migrant communities in the United States illustrates that active transnational citizenship building is not self-evident among indigenous migrant communities in the United States. It seems like that indigenous Oaxaqueños in Los Angeles represent a relatively unique case, especially regarding institutionalization of their community and efforts of transnational citizenship building compared to other indigenous migrant communities. Although indigenous Oaxacan migrants, primarily Mixtecs, established HTA's in other US cities and towns to practice translocal belonging and citizenship, their transnational connections and activities are restricted to hometowns (Kearney/Besserer 2004). Furthermore, Mixtecs in other Californian cities developed in fact transnational political migrant organizations; such as the *Asociación Cívica Benito Juárez (ACBJ)*, *Red Internacional Indígena Oaxaquena (RIIO)* and a branch of *FIOB* in Fresno, the *Coalición de Comunidades Indígenas de Oaxaca (COCIO)* in Vista, or another *FIOB* branch in San Diego (see Fox/Rivera-Salgado 2004, Velasco Ortiz 2005), but in none of these cities, Mixtecs developed non-political civic organizations, such as business, educational or religious organizations to construct citizenship above political meanings.

And yet other indigenous migrant groups from Mexico do not construct transnational citizenship at all. For instance, Nahuas – the largest indigenous group in Mexico – do not maintain links to its sending communities in Mexico (Fox 2006). Also, Otomis from Hidalgo in Florida (Schmidt/Crummet 2004), or Purépechas from Michoacán in the rural Midwest of the United States (Anderson 2004) practice very little transnational politics, mainly because of their wide dispersion and minor level of organization. Also interesting is the case of Mayan migrants from Chiapas in the United States: In contrast to Oaxaqueños, they do negotiate transnational citizenship that is initiated in a top-down process by the state of Chiapas. In this process, they do not organize in indigenous migrant communities, but they joined Chiapanecan mestizo migrant organizations established by the government of Chiapas in US states like Florida or California. Therefore, Mayans formed collectively a primarily regional citizenship based on the state of origin instead of their ethnic origin (Mayan or indigenous origin) (interviews with members and leaders of Chiapanecan migrant organizations). In summary, it seems like that none of other Mexican indigenous migrant groups in the United States developed such a well institutionalized civil society to negotiate transnational citizenship than Oaxaqueños in Los Angeles.

Why does the Oaxacan community in Los Angeles actually stick out compared to other indigenous migrant groups in the United States? The well-developed institutionalization and citizenship efforts of the indigenous Oaxacan community can be explained by different reasons. Some of the reasons could be:

- 1) Their decades long tradition of migration provided enough time to accumulate resources and skills to develop a strong feeling of belonging to the pan-indigenous Oaxacan community, to organize as well as to establish networks to indigenous communities of origin. Additionally, as mentioned above, Oaxaqueños in Los Angeles present with more than 70,000 people the largest indigenous community in all US cities (Kissam 2012).
- 2) Their concentration in two main neighborhoods – Pico Union close to downtown and in Santa Monica – of the greater Los Angeles area instead of dispersion all over the city makes it easier to organize in migrant organizations and to establish close networks of communication and cooperation among community members.
- 3) Their specific rules and norms of Zapotecan and Mixtecan *tequio* and *cargo* contribute to a stronger indigenous identity and commitment to the well-being of communities of origin in Oaxaca through transnational bonds. At other indigenous migrant groups, such as Nahuas or Mayans, traditions of *usos y costumbres* are less distinct or even not pronounced at all (Fox/Rivera-Salgado 2004).
- 4) The relative beneficial political opportunity structure (POS) in urban Los Angeles is characterized by a long tradition of immigration, relatively liberal and progressive local and state immigrant policy, e.g. Californian *DREAM Act*, and by a cosmopolitan as well as multi-ethnic environment which opens diverse opportunities for migrants to access education and other relevant resources. That kind of POS is less pronounced in most other US cities and towns.

Probably, these factors also provide opportunities that relatively many indigenous Oaxacan migrants could gain good education. Although, there are no accessible statistics about successes in education of indigenous migrants in Los Angeles, it is noticeable that more than half of the interviewees of this study acquired at least a bachelor degree, some even achieved or still pursue a doctor's degree. Particularly, the second and third migrant generations are very successful in gaining education. They are represented at all larger universities in Los Angeles (interviews with second generation indigenous students). How these younger generations will actually behave regarding their citizenship building in migrant communities and relation to home communities of their ancestors might be an interesting research project in the future.



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